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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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~ eBay Bans Virtual Booty ~ Cyber-Bullying Grows! ~ New HDDriver Update!
~ Web "Tagging" Popular! ~ Sex Predators Targeted ~ US Gov't Earns 'D'!
~ New Zero-Day Warning! ~ Web Over Gardening??!! ~ New Eureka Version!

-* Gates Promises Vista Wows! *-
-* Adobe Pushes To Make PDF Standard! *-
-* Apple Seeks Patent For Bottom-Feeding Drive *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

Although the possibility is out there that we'll get another dusting this evening, we're still snow-less here in suburban Boston! Here we are, at that "pivotal" point on the calendar - Groundhog Day - and we've had less than two inches of snow so far this winter! Now, I realize that things tend to balance out over time, and we'll probably get buried in the white stuff sooner or later, but I'm enjoying not having to deal with it yet. Sure, we've had some bouts of really cold temperatures, but that's an issue most of us can handle with hardly more than a whimper. Spring here in the Northeast is usually an extremely wet season, so I'm not worried about things like drought-like conditions. Another six weeks of winter according to Puxatawny Phil - I'm ready!

I was surprised that I didn't get any feedback from last week's comments regarding the various MySpace issues. I figured that I'd get at least one or two e-mails, regardless of the position on the topic. Oh well, perhaps people aren't overly concerned about what their kids are doing online, or whether or not they have an opinion about such issues. That's fine - I had a bug in my ear and I got it out!

So, to make up for last week's two voluminous commentaries, I'll be quiet this week. I'm sure another fiery topic will surface soon enough!

Until next time...

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HDDriver 8.2

There is a new version of HDDRIVER available, with the most prominent change the support of IDE drives with a capacity of up to 2048 GByte (LBA-48). (Up to now only 128 GByte were supported.) For SCSI drives there is no change, i.e. drives up to 8192 GByte are supported.

A list of changes in the latest version 8.2 and a new demo version is available on http://www.seimet.de/hddriver_english.html.

February Release of Eureka 2.12

Hi,

The software "Eureka 2.12" is updated on its WEB page. It is a "2D Graph Describer and 3D Modeller". You will fetch it from :

<<http://eureka.atari.org/eurka702.zip>>

That is the Complete Common Edition

<<http://eureka.atari.org/eurka020.zip>>

Is the Complete 68020 Edition

<<http://eureka.atari.org/eurkafpu.zip>>

Is the Limited FPU Edition

<<http://eureka.atari.org/eurklite.zip>>

Is the Lite Edition, working on early ST with 720kb floppy

<http://eureka.atari.org/lib_dgem.zip>

Are Dynamic Libraries Extensions for Eureka

<<http://eureka.atari.org/tiny045.zip>>

Is the OpenGL Extension (requires previous package)

This publication corresponds to 20th anniversary of its starting developments, that began at first months of 1987.

I wish you big fun with this new STuff !

Best ATARIans regards,

-- François LE COAT

Author of Eureka 2.12

<<http://eureka.atari.org/>>

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!

JagFest UK 2007 (its not just for Jaguars you know)

This year's JagFest UK will be held at the Medway Manor Hotel, Rochester, Kent, England on the 30th June & 1st July.

For the full weekend experience arrival and setting up will start late afternoon and evening the day before (29th June) as usual.

Come and see Jaguars, VCSSs, STs, TTs Falcons, Hades, Milans and more including an appearance by one of only two working Jaguar Virtual Reality headsets.

Keep an eye on <http://www.jagfest.org/uk/JFK2007/index.shtml> for updates on who and what will be in attendance.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I don't know if we're going to have enough messages for a real column this week, but we're gonna give it a shot.

You know how I often go off on tangents and rant about stuff that has nothing to do with computers in general or Atari computers in particular? Well, this is another one of those times. [grin]

If you've read this column for any amount of time, you know that I've got a lot of interests that have nothing to do with any of the other interests. Well, we all are like that to one extent or another. It's just a question of how far apart the interests are and how vocal we choose to be about our interests.

Well, I was reading an article this week about the status of the North American bison. It seems that there are two distinct genetic lines of bison, and they're both right in and around Yellowstone National Park. I didn't pay attention to whether or not there was a natural barrier to their intermingling. It was the fact that there were two genetic lines that interested me.

So I did a little research and found that there were a lot of bison/cattle hybrids that have been reintroduced into the stocks of both wild and 'farmed' buffalo. There were both cattalo and beefalo that was bred to grow faster than buffalo, be more docile like cattle, and have meat that was lower in fat and cholesterol than beef.

Well, it worked to a certain extent, but the country loves beef, and has a mental block about bison.

Oh, by the way, did you know that North American Bison are NOT buffaloes? Buffaloes are the big, massive-horned creatures that roam around parts of Asia and Africa. American Buffalo are related, but they're not actually buffalo.

Anyway, there's a lot of controversy about what to do with these bison that have cattle DNA in them... some want to just destroy them all and

be done with it. Others say that this would seriously deplete the stocks of 'REAL' bison to a mere handful... some say less than 50 specimens, and that if it looks like a bison and smells like a bison and it snorts like a bison... well, you get the idea.

Still others propose compromises like any specimen that's more than 5/8 bison genome is a bison.

Me? Well, I never really thought about it. A genetically pure bloodline would be nice to have. I mean, what's the use of preserving critters that are 'tainted', right? Well, tainted or not, these animals are here now. Like I said, I never really thought about this before. Are hybrids as desirable as 'purebreds'?

The reason I'm mentioning this is not because I'm really into nature and... oh, what you might call the Zen of genetics, but because it's just another example of something that has valuable points on both sides of the equation, and its something that most of us never thought of and never would have thought of had we not decided to read this little article in this little online magazine about a little 'also-ran' computer model from more than a decade ago.

But you did read it, and I'll lay odds that you'll think at least a little bit about those big, nasty-smelling, bull-headed creatures that at one time roamed throughout huge portions of the plain states, and about their offspring and whether or not they're pure bison or part cattle. Maybe you'll think about ranchers out in Wyoming and the government subsidy that they're not getting anymore, and what a bison might think about whether or not its got some cow DNA. You might think about any one of those things, or about something that I haven't thought about yet, but you'll think. And when all is said and done, thinking is good.

Okay, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, posts this about his offering:

"There is a new version of HDDRIVER available, with the most prominent change the support of IDE drives with a capacity of up to 2048 GByte (LBA-48). (Up to now only 128 GByte were supported.) For SCSI drives there is no change, i.e. drives up to 8192 GByte are supported.

A list of changes in the latest version 8.2 and a new demo version is available on http://www.seimet.de/hddriver_english.html."

Adam Klobukowski tells Uwe:

"I see, with IDE drives, you stopped at maximum XHDI can handle (32 bits). Have you considered extending XHDI with new functions to fully support 48 bit addressing? (that would give us max of 131 072 000 GB)"

Uwe answers good-naturedly:

"Ask me this question again as soon as Atari users want to add drives larger than 2048 GB to their Atari!"

Adam tells Uwe:

"There already are 1TB disks, I think we'll see 4TB this year. I'm thinking about buying one!"

Peter Schneider adds:

"My first hard disk was a Megafile 30, my current one is an IBM DCAS with 4 GB, and I'm pretty sure I will never need a larger drive as long as working with my TT.

I really do laugh when looking ad the ads for Windows Vista, especially when regarding the hardware requirements..."

Henk Robbers adds his thoughts on that last subject:

"A sensible name convention for modern operating systems would be the names of palaces:

Louvres
Fontainebleau
Versailles
...
Hermitage

The order reflects the increasing need for royal households through history. They also all accommodate only 1 king."

'Calimero' adds:

"[The] Limit of 120GB was a little bit annoying but 2TB should be fine for quite some time..."

Anyway, how you manage to fill even a 120GB hard disc on an Atari? All the games and programs for the Atari ST and F030 will take only 10% of that space... Do you have 100GB of MP3s?"

Frank Szymanski tells Calimaro:

"I once converted all my CDs into MP3 (and used my Falcon for that) and now consider storing the content of these CDs as .wav-files on the falcon so I don't get any quality loss (except the fact that the DA converters in the falcon are not the best ones)."

Well folks, that's it for this week. I know that there's only one message thread here, but that's really all that was going on in the NewsGroup this week. Maybe we'll get lucky next week and we'll have a bunch of things to talk about. 'Till then, keep your ears open so you'll hear what they're saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Sony May Have To Cut PS3 Price!

Wii News Channel Launched!
eBay Bans Virtual Booty!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Nintendo Launches Wii News Channel

Besides television, radio, Internet and newspapers where do you get your news? Would you consider using a game console to receive your news? That's what Nintendo and the Associated Press are hoping.

A new feature for Nintendo Wii owners is the "Wii News Channel", which launched on Saturday. The content will comprise news from the Associated Press and will offer stories on various categories from across the country and around the world.

"What Wii has done for video gaming, we hope it will also accomplish for news," says Nintendo of America President Reggie Fils-Aime. "Just by pointing at your TV screen, you become your own interactive editor, instantly accessing the latest headline stories, whether they originate in Kansas City or Kyoto."

Japanese gamers have their own version of the news channel, which is provided by Internet news portal Goo. European Wii gamers will begin receiving News Channel content later this year.

The free news channel allows users to spin a virtual globe and point to the location of a news event with their Wii Remote. The AP will supply news for the Wii in English, Spanish, French, Dutch and German.

Wii users will be able to browse news under categories including Business, Sports, Arts/Entertainment, Technology and Science/Health. Icons will show which stories have been read, which are text and which ones have photos. Users will also be able to change the size of the text.

"The Associated Press is always looking for innovative ways to expand its audience for news and information," said Jane Seagrave, vice president and director of AP's digital division. "The Wii News Channel extends our global reach even further, on yet another platform, offering our news to

people who otherwise might not see it."

To Break Even, Sony May Cut PlayStation 3 Price

Although Sony is blaming its faltering profits partly on PlayStation 3 price cuts in Japan, a senior executive said yesterday that slashing prices further may be in store for the just-launched video game machine.

Pricing is one of the factors Sony Corp. is studying; it expects to break even in its money-losing gaming business next fiscal year, said senior vice president Takao Yuhara, stressing that no additional price cut has been decided on.

The PS3 was launched in the United States and Japan in November, plagued with production problems that resulted in shortages and will keep the machines out of Europe entirely until March.

The next-generation game player also faces immense competition from Nintendo Co.'s Wii and Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360.

Sony's disclosure Tuesday that October-December profit slipped 5 percent to \$1.3 billion sent Sony shares down 1.4 percent in Tokyo yesterday. The shares closed at \$46.33, up three cents, on the New York Stock Exchange. Yuhara said red ink in the gaming division for the fiscal year through March could be worse than the \$1.6 billion operating loss that Sony is forecasting.

Nintendo Video Games Winners With Fans And Critics

Japanese video game giant Nintendo Co. Ltd. was the top winner at the 2006 People's Choice 1UP Awards hosted by the Ziff Davis Game Group in San Francisco on Wednesday.

"The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess" for Nintendo's new Wii console was voted game of the year and best adventure title by users of the 1UP Network of video game fan sites.

"Wii Sports," also for the Wii, was named most innovative and best sports game.

1UP Editors voted "Zelda" console game of the year. "The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion" from Bethesda Softworks and Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. took home the award for PC game of the year.

Ebay Bans Online Auctions Of Virtual Game Booty

Ebay said that it had banned auctions of virtual gold, armor and other booty amassed in World of Warcraft and other online computer games.

The San Jose, California-based Internet auction house decided to bar sales of what was essentially computer code representing riches, swords

and other items in games due to "legal complexities" regarding ownership.

"We decided it was best to just not allow sales of them," Ebay spokesman Hani Durzy said of virtual game goods.

"We are not saying they are legal and we are not saying they are illegal." Ebay continues to allow auctions of items from virtual societies such as Second Life, where people represented by animated figures called "avatars" buy and sell homes and other "property" made of computer codes.

"Right now, Second Life is not considered a game so we are not applying the restriction to it," Durzy said.

In massive multiplayer online role-playing games such as Warcraft gamers represented by avatars wage battles and undertake quests, gathering gold, weaponry, armor and other virtual goods along the way.

Enterprising young gamers have earned livings playing Warcraft and selling their booty online to those willing to pay to advance quickly through the different levels of the games.

Durzy compared the ban on Ebay auctions of virtual game goods to the firm's decisions to bar sales of alcohol or tobacco, which are lawful products controlled by complex governmental regulations.

Ebay removes auctions of virtual game items found on its website, Durzy said. The policy was put in place within the past few weeks.

"Remember, our policies are ever evolving," Durzy said. "We will change them if the communities, state of the culture, or laws dictate such."

Ebay would not disclose the volume of sales of virtual game items it had recorded on its website, which reported 53.5 billion dollars worth of online auction trades in 2006.

Godzilla Stomps Onto PSP

Atari announced the impending release of *Godzilla: Unleashed* for the Wii, Nintendo DS, and PSP.

Godzilla: Unleashed follows in the monstrous footsteps of last-generation's *Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee*. The game stars the titular Godzilla, as well as a slew of some of his most famous adversaries. *Godzilla: Unleashed* features urban arenas littered with fully destructible skyscrapers and towering alien formations.

"The iconic Japanese giant goes from strength to strength, taking the franchise in new directions not least with the unprecedented dynamic control afforded by the unique Wii controller," said Cyril Voiron of Atari Europe.

The game features a fully reinvented combat system, which on the Wii allows for a greater degree of control over your monster as you decimate cities in your quest to become the King of Monsters. The game will also feature a non-linear storyline, which will be affected by players' choices in battle.

The game is scheduled for a fall release on all of the announced platforms.

Wii Is Guest Of Honor At New Genre Of Parties

Kris Smith called it "the equivalent of a man Tupperware party." In early December, he and a few pals gathered in a basement in suburban Chicago to try out their friend's brand new Nintendo Wii video game console.

At the end of the night, Smith, 32, was sweaty, exhausted, and completely sold on buying a Wii for himself.

Smith, who never enjoyed video games before the Wii, said the console has given him a new way not only to enjoy time with his wife and children, but also to socialize with his friends.

After securing his own Wii, Smith, who heads new media initiatives at a start-up, organized a "Wii Tournament" that included an hour warm-up session and a trophy for the winner. The invitation told guests: "If you have ever picked your nose or punched someone, you can get in on the fun."

Smith's recent event is just one of a slew of Wii-themed home parties that have cropped up since the console's launch late last year.

According to Wii owners, the console's motion-sensitive controller, which can be swung like a tennis racquet or sword, makes it perfect for groups of people to take turns bowling or swordfighting in their living rooms.

"It's almost as entertaining to watch people playing as to be on the system," said Mike Marusin, the friend of Smith's who turned him on to the Wii.

Perrin Kaplan, vice president of marketing for Nintendo of America, said the Wii was also popular at family gatherings over the holidays - including her own.

"For the first time ever over the holidays all the people in my household were playing together," Kaplan said. "I know it was a first for a lot of households."

Indeed, Marusin said he was floored by how the Wii caught on not, only with his wife and friends, but also with his extended family.

"My father-in-law, who doesn't even have a debit card, was bowling," Marusin said. "That was the big talk of the family."

John Sams, a 20-year-old student in Greenville, South Carolina, said he knew the Wii would be provide a new opportunity for socializing before it even became available. As a result, he and his brother, Indy, 22, started a Web site to link up people interested in Wii gaming parties in their area.

The site, <http://www.wiiparty.net>, has about 150 registered members and Sams said he has met several people through the site who have attended Wii parties at his apartment.

He now has friends and classmates over to play games like "Red Steel" and "Excite Truck" at least four times a week.

"I became famous for it," Sams said.

Recently, a man sent to repair his building's security system even joined in on the fun.

"He wanted to play, so he stayed for about 30 minutes before his cell phone went off," Sams said.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Gates Promises Vista Will Wow PC Buyers

Acrobatics, blaring music and plenty of hype accompanied Microsoft Corp.'s long-delayed debut of its new Windows Vista operating system.

Hours before the software went on sale in New York, dancers clad in Microsoft colors dangled from ropes high above street level and unfurled flags to form the red, green, blue and yellow Windows logo against a building wall. At a swank midtown eatery, speakers pumped out a hit from hip-hop hotshot Snoop Dogg before Steve Ballmer, Microsoft's chief executive officer, took to stage.

"Vista is the center, the launching point for the next generation of connected entertainment in the home," Ballmer said.

Vista was set to go on sale around the globe Tuesday, along with new versions of Microsoft Exchange e-mail software and the flagship Office business suite, which includes Word, Excel and PowerPoint. Several retailers had even scheduled midnight openings.

But unlike the recent launches of next-generation game machines like Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 3, customers haven't been camping out for days.

"When I look at Windows Vista, I see a technology that is interesting, that is relevant, but to some extent is evolutionary," said Al Gillen, an analyst at the technology research group IDC. "I do not believe it will create a lot of motivation for people to rush out and get a new operating system."

In an interview, Microsoft chairman Bill Gates said the company actually wasn't pushing midnight sales events - after all, the software will be available as a download over the Web for the first time. Even that route will be relatively rarely taken - Ballmer acknowledged that, as in the past, most consumers will switch to Vista only when they buy new computers.

More than five years in the making, Vista was released for businesses Nov. 30, but the unveiling for consumers of the latest edition of Windows - which runs more than 90 percent of the world's PCs - only came Tuesday.

Vista retails for \$100 to \$400, depending on the version and whether the user is upgrading from Windows XP.

The Redmond, Wash.-based software maker contends that Vista is such a huge improvement over previous computing platforms that users inevitably say "Wow" when they see it.

Gates ticked off some examples, such as how Vista presents a slick 3-D graphical user interface and document icons that give at-a-glance previews. Gates said the next wow comes when people start using a system-wide search program that Microsoft's engineers built into both the operating system and new versions of Office.

Vista comes as changing dynamics of computing - notably the rise of open-source software and Web-based services that replicate what traditionally could be done only on a desktop computer - are threatening Microsoft's dominance in the industry.

But Gates contended that the operating system has a higher profile than ever before, as the PC has morphed from a souped-up typewriter to a networked entertainment center, personal media library and gateway to the Internet.

"When people think about their PC, they think about Windows even more than who the manufacturer is. That determines how it looks, how you navigate, what the applications are that are available," Gates told The Associated Press. And in this case, Vista has folded in programs that users once bought separately - including automated backup systems and some spyware protections.

Microsoft built Vista so that different layers could be upgraded separately, so it's possible that this is the last massive, all-in-one update for Windows. No matter how Microsoft chooses to roll out Vista's successor, Ballmer said there's still work to be done.

"There's so many areas in which we need innovation. Developers need a richer platform if we're going to get speech, voice, natural language, and more rich 3-D-type graphics into the user interface," Ballmer said. Plus, the technologies around the PC - chips, storage, high-definition DVD will all evolve, he said. "The operating system will need to evolve with them."

"Frankly, we've got a very long list of stuff our engineers want to do, a long list of stuff that the companies here want us to do," he said.

Over the weekend, Dell Inc. started taking orders for PCs with Vista. Kevin Rollins, Dell's chief executive, said the company's Web site saw a 20 percent jump in traffic, with "tens of thousands of copies" of Vista sold for delivery Tuesday or later.

In Tokyo, about 80 people lined up Monday night at the Bic Camera Department Store to become among the world's first consumers to own Vista. Celebrities and executives were on hand as a large-screen TV displayed a countdown to the midnight launch (10 a.m. EST).

The second person in line, Fumihiro Koyama, 33, waited three hours and was hoping the new operating system will make his work in Web design easier.

"My expectations are very high for Vista," he said. "I want to try it out because it's new."

For a Tuesday morning store celebration, DSG International PLC's flagship PC World store in central London hired costumed characters, including Sherlock Holmes for security and a movie star for multimedia.

PC World spokesman Hamish Thompson said some retailers are banking on Vista to push customers toward the higher-end machines needed to run Vista - which imposes such hardware requirements as 1 gigabyte of system memory, or RAM.

Few Rush Out To Buy New Windows Vista

Consumers can finally get their hands on Microsoft Corp.'s long-delayed Windows Vista, but unlike the mad midnight rushes retailers saw with the recently released video game consoles, stores saw only a trickle of early adopters Tuesday.

Retailers around the world held special midnight events Monday or opened early Tuesday morning, as the Vista operating system and Office 2007 business software went on sale in 70 countries. Some stores, including a Best Buy in midtown Manhattan, brought in extra employees to handle pent-up demand for Vista.

At a CompUSA in San Jose, Calif., David Keller, a 40-year-old information-technology consultant from Jacksonville, Fla., was among the first in line to pick up a new Hewlett-Packard Co. laptop at midnight (3 a.m. EST). "I've been waiting and waiting, and I've been using my personal laptop for work; it's not working well," he said. "This is a big deal for me. I'll hopefully get the better performance that I need, and I won't have to go through the trouble of upgrading later."

But at another CompUSA store in Raleigh, N.C., only about a dozen people braved frigid late-night temperatures to stake their claim on a copy of Vista.

This is the first time since 1995 that Microsoft simultaneously released new versions of Windows and Office, the software package that includes Word and Excel. Although the vast majority of people worldwide still run Windows machines and use Word to type up documents, the company faces growing competition from Linux open-source operating systems and an array of free desktop or Web-based programs for word processing, e-mail and other services.

Microsoft said PC users will want to upgrade to Vista for its 3-D user interface and speedy desktop search function. The Redmond, Wash., software maker also touts Vista's improved security and parental controls. For Office 2007, Microsoft tossed out familiar menus and buttons and replaced them with a "ribbon" of settings that change depending on a user's current task.

But consumers whose computers work fine with Windows XP, Vista's five-year-old predecessor, may not see a compelling reason to switch. Al Gillen, an analyst at technology research group IDC, estimates it will take five to seven years before the majority of systems running XP are retired.

Michael Bridges of Mabank, Texas, was the lone customer perusing the

sprawling display of Vista software and computers at a Fry's Electronics store in Dallas on Tuesday morning.

Bridges, a 53-year-old who works in the highway construction business, said he was curious to see the various editions of Vista but had no immediate plans to buy a copy.

"Every time Windows comes out it has bugs," he said. "I don't want to pay for that yet. I'll probably wait a couple of months."

Kathleen Calvin echoed those concerns as she left a Best Buy in Brooklyn, Ohio, empty-handed.

"I just want to make sure it's something that's going to work well," she said. During the past few weeks, shelves in the computer section at a Best Buy in midtown New York have been essentially bare, as consumers lost interest in laptops with XP and the retailer cleared space to sell new machines running Vista, which imposes such hardware requirements as 1 gigabyte of system memory, or RAM.

Consumers who want to upgrade a relatively new XP computer can expect to drop \$100 to \$259 for Vista alone, depending on the version (a standalone version of Vista costs up to \$399, but it is already included in the price of new PCs).

While Microsoft boasts that 1.5 million devices are Vista-compatible now, analysts warn of a potentially rocky transition.

"The real proof I think is going to be in the first few weeks, where we see if all the vendors really stepped up to getting their drivers right," said Michael Silver, an analyst at Gartner, a research group. "It is definite that some things won't work, especially if you're trying to make an older PC learn new tricks."

But as in the past, most consumers will switch to Vista only when they buy new computers, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer said Monday during a launch-related event.

Apple Seeks Patents For Bottom-Loading Disk Drive

Apple has applied for two patents related to a bottom-loading disk drive for a notebook.

The patents, first reported on Friday by technology blog Engadget, relate to having a disk drive on the bottom of a notebook. Today, disk drives on Apple MacBooks are accessed through a slot on the front of the machines.

One of the patent applications filed with the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office is for an access system for a portable device. "The portable computer is accessed through an active user interface on the bottom surface of the portable computer," the application, dated Jan. 25, says.

The other application, also dated Jan. 25, is for a disk drive media access system that would apparently prevent the disk from falling out of the drive.

Apple wasn't immediately available for comment.

A potential benefit of a bottom-loading disk drive would be a thinner notebook.

However, there's no indication of Apple's plans for the patents, or whether the technology would eventually make its way into products.

Adobe Pushes for PDF Standardization

In a competitive move against Microsoft's emerging XPS format, Adobe on Monday released its Portable Document Format 1.7 specification to a standards group for official recognition.

While PDF is already the unofficial standard for electronic documents, Adobe hopes to set the format in stone and lock out Microsoft by releasing the specification to the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) for publication by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

Much like PDF, Microsoft's XPS, or XML Paper Specification, allows users to distribute and print documents without installing the actual application that created them. Some analysts view Microsoft's decision to remove the "Save As PDF" feature from its new Office productivity suite and replace it with XPS as a clear indication that the software giant intends to battle Adobe in this arena.

Kevin Lynch, senior vice president and chief software architect at Adobe, threw down the gauntlet in the ISO arena, calling the company's decision to seek approval the next logical step in the evolution of PDF from de facto standard to a formal, de jure standard.

"By releasing the full PDF specification for ISO standardization, we are reinforcing our commitment to openness," Lynch said in a statement, arguing that standardization will drive continued innovation and expand the PDF ecosystem that has developed over the past 15 years.

Adobe published the complete PDF specification in 1993, giving it a leg up on Microsoft's nascent XPS format and offering business users more robust capabilities, according to Directions on Microsoft analyst Greg DeMichillie. XPS, he added, is immature compared to PDF.

"Consumers will find the functions of PDF and XPS similar; you open an electronic file and it looks just like it would on paper," he noted. "But from a business perspective, you can do much more with PDF on several levels."

One key difference between PDF and XPS is platform support. PDF readers are available for Mac, Linux, and old and new versions of Windows. Currently, XPS is supported only on Microsoft products.

A second difference is the number of PDF creation tools on the market. Beyond Adobe, there are free and fee-based third-party tools available to create the electronic files. XPS does not offer this level of creation support.

Finally, Adobe offers server support for PDF. Customers can fill out forms online, click "send," and dispatch a PDF file to an organization's server.

The server can then process the file.

"Microsoft wants to add these types of features," DeMichillie said, "but XPS doesn't yet make them available. PDF has far more supporting processes to help businesses incorporate electronic files into their operations."

ZINK Prints Without Ink

Printers are cheap; one can be purchased for as little as \$49. But how would printer manufacturers survive without selling ink, as well? ZINK, a startup, doesn't care.

Printers all need their regular fix of consumables that include photo paper, and, of course, ink; a key method of making money for Epson, HP, Lexmark, and Canon.

ZINK's new patented print technology (the company claims over 100 patents), introduced here at DEMO 07, doesn't need ink wells to create a photo. Instead, it uses special paper, which includes a layer of dye crystals sealed under a special polymer coating-embedded paper, and a portable printer. The printer doesn't have ink cartridges or ribbons, instead applying heat to the special paper, which then, according to ZINK (which stands for "Zero Ink"), "colorizes the crystals" and apparently brings them through to the surface of the paper. The end result is a color photo.

We saw, albeit briefly, a pocket-sized prototype of a ZINK printer; however, the company has no intention of building the actual output devices. ZINK executives said they plan on licensing the thermal printing technology to other printer OEMs. Company representatives believe the ZINK printer and paper will have a big impact.

"ZINK...provides a magical user experience, can transform any device into a printer, is good to the environment, and most importantly, makes people smile," said Wendy Caswell, president and chief executive of ZINK Imaging, in a presentation here.

"Tagging" Content Popular Online

Internet users are taking avidly to sites that let them label photos, movies and blogs with their own descriptive tags, providing a major new way of organizing information online, according to a survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

The December survey, released Wednesday, found that 28 percent of Internet users have tagged content, and 7 percent have done so on a typical day.

Tagging is used to organize photos on Yahoo Inc.'s Flickr, Web site bookmarks on Yahoo's del.icio.us and video on Google Inc.'s YouTube. Google's Gmail e-mail service also uses a form of tagging, although its "labels" are for personal rather than group organizing.

With tagging, a YouTube video of a python attacking rabbit gets tags that include "python, snake, rabbit, reptile, eat, devour, food, chain,"

helping to guide people who search the site looking for any of those things.

The people most likely to be taggers are typical early adopters, the survey found: They are under age 40, use broadband Internet connections and have above-average income and education.

It was the first time Pew asked about tagging, so it couldn't say how fast the phenomenon as a whole is growing.

In commentary accompanying the survey results, David Weinberger, a fellow at Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet & Society, contrasts the use of tagging to older methods of organizing information, like the Dewey Decimal system used in libraries.

The Dewey system is a hierachal system in which each book belongs only to one category, while tagging lets users organize things in multiple categories that are useful to them.

"You may want to tag, say, a Stephen King story as 'horror,' but maybe to me it's 'ghost story' and to a literature professor it's 'pop culture,'" Weinberger writes. The beauty of the system is that all those views can co-exist.

The survey polled 2,373 adults Nov. 30 to Dec. 30 by phone, of which 1,623 were Internet users. It had a margin of sampling error of 3 percentage points.

US Government Earns A 'D' In Cybersecurity

The Cyber Security Industry Alliance has given the U.S. government D grades on its cybersecurity efforts in 2006, and renewed its call for the U.S. Congress to pass a comprehensive data protection law in 2007.

The CSIA, a trade group representing cybersecurity vendors, gave the U.S. government D grades in three areas: security of sensitive information, security and reliability of critical infrastructure, and federal government information assurance.

"Government needs to take these issues very seriously," said Liz Gasster, the CSIA's acting executive director and general counsel.

Among the problems in 2006: The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reported a data breach involving the personal information of 26.5 million military veterans and family members. Other agencies also reported multiple lost laptops containing personal information. The CSIA called on agencies to notify citizens of data breaches.

After a rash of reported data breaches in early 2005, members of Congress introduced multiple bills requiring companies with data breaches to notify affected consumers. But a breach-notification law failed to pass, partly because of jurisdictional fights between multiple congressional committees.

A comprehensive data security bill should include breach notification, but also a requirement that all organizations holding sensitive data - including private companies, government agencies, nonprofits, and educational institutions - use reasonable security standards, Gasster said.

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission has taken action against several companies, but a comprehensive law would give the FTC or another agency broad jurisdiction to investigate data breaches, she said.

The CSIA is optimistic a comprehensive data breach law will pass in the next year, even though it stalled in the last Congress, Gasster added. Major data breaches continue to happen, and consumers will increase the pressure on Congress to act, she predicted. In mid-January, retailer TJX Companies Inc. reported a massive data breach.

"Consumers just are not going to put up with is," Gasster said.

Here's how the CSIA generated its government cybersecurity grades:

-- Security of sensitive information, grade D: Congress ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Cyber Crime, allowing the U.S. to work with other signatories on cybersecurity investigations, but failed to pass a comprehensive law to protect sensitive personal information.

-- Security and resiliency of the critical information infrastructure, grade D: The Department of Homeland Security appointed an assistant secretary for cybersecurity and telecommunications and implemented some cybersecurity program, but it hasn't offered a clear agenda for its top cybersecurity research and development priorities or established a survivable emergency coordination network to handle a large-scale cybersecurity disaster.

-- Federal information assurance, grade D: Government continues to offer a "mixed bag of successes and failures," the CSIA said, with progress within the White House Office of Management and Budget's enforcement of cybersecurity directives and implementation of U.S. President George Bush's Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12, requiring agencies to start issuing smart identification cards. But the government needs to do a better job in several areas, including security issues with telecommuting and releasing information on the cost of cyberattacks, the CSIA said.

In addition to a comprehensive data protection bill, CSIA called for the U.S. government to strengthen the power of agency chief information officers and called on agencies to increase testing of cybersecurity controls.

Lawmakers Target Online Sex Predators

In a move to protect children from online threats, U.S. Senators Charles Schumer and John McCain on Tuesday introduced legislation that would require sex offenders to submit e-mail addresses, instant-message names, and other identifying Internet information to federal authorities. But critics of the bill say more should be done.

The "Keeping the Internet Devoid of Sexual Predators Act of 2007," or KIDS Act, would place a convicted felon's electronic identifying information in the National Sex Offender Registry, and allow social-networking sites to cross-check user information against the registry to protect kids from online predators.

"Millions of teenagers log on to Web sites like MySpace and they, and their parents, shouldn't have to worry about running in to these predators

online," Schumer said in a statement, adding that sex offenders have no business joining social-networking communities.

Under the proposed legislation, any sex offender who submits a fraudulent e-mail address could face jail time. Further, any offender caught using an unregistered e-mail address would be in violation of probation or parole terms and face a return to prison.

The senators reason that sex offenders who provide fraudulent e-mails offer law enforcement a clue that they are attempting to evade detection.

"The fight to protect our children from sexual predators has moved from the playground to the Internet. By adopting this legislation, Congress would be able to provide Web sites with the tools to develop innovative solutions to protect children," McCain said in a statement.

MySpace and Facebook, along with the American Family Association, have endorsed the KIDS Act. But some legal experts said the legislation does not go far enough to protect the Internet's youngest social networkers.

"This bill is not enough and we are in agreement with the Attorney Generals who are involved in this issue that MySpace should implement age verification technology," said Adam Loewy, a partner with Barry & Loewy LLP, the firm that has filed lawsuits on behalf of four families that allege their minor daughters were solicited online and then sexually abused by adult MySpace users.

Families from New York, Texas, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina filed separate suits last week in Los Angeles Superior Court, alleging negligence, recklessness, fraud, and negligent misrepresentation by MySpace and its parent company News Corp. The companies named in the suit could not immediately be reached for comment.

MySpace has taken steps to implement technology designed to keep kids safe, including rolling out the MySpace Guardian Toolbar to help parents track activity of a child's page. MySpace also has partnered with Sentinel to create a database that it uses to identify, block, or delete accounts of known sex offenders using its community. Still, some are not satisfied.

"The age verification technology, which does exist, is the best way to protect children on sites like MySpace. MySpace's refusal to adopt the age verification technology indicates that it is just not serious about protecting children," Loewy insisted. "The argument that there can't be a perfect solution is a cynical excuse. Everything possible that can be done should be done."

Symantec Warns of New Zero-Day Word Attack

Hackers are exploiting a new, unpatched vulnerability in Microsoft Word that could allow them to take control of a victim's computer, Symantec has warned.

The zero-day vulnerability is the fourth in Microsoft's widely-used Word 2000 software that has not yet been patched, the security company said in its Security Response Warning.

A zero-day vulnerability refers to a security hole for which exploits are already available when it was discovered. This latest one affects most versions of Windows running Word, Symantec's advisory said.

Danish security vendor Secunia ApS also reported the vulnerability, and rated it as "extremely critical," its highest-level warning. Microsoft, however, said the attacks are "very limited."

The attack comes via an infected Word document, a method increasingly used by hackers for targeted attacks. If the document is opened, it installs a Trojan horse program, called Trojan.Mdropper.W, onto the computer, Lau wrote. The Trojan also puts other files on a computer that enable a hacker to control it.

Microsoft released three sets of critical patches on Jan. 9, including ones for Outlook, PowerPoint and Windows, but not for Word.

Users can avoid trouble by not opening unexpected Word documents attached to e-mail. Hackers often spam out thousands of messages with harmful attachments, such as Trojan horse programs, hoping unsuspecting victims will open them.

Trojans often look harmless and can quietly install themselves on a computer with no visible signs. The use of Word to mount an attack can be particularly effective since the file format is so widely used.

"Silver Surfers" Choose Web Over Gardening

Retired people are starting to prefer browsing the Internet to more traditional pastimes such as gardening, travel and DIY, according to a survey on Friday.

Those questioned by insurance company AXA said they spend an average of six hours a week online, shopping, doing research and e-mailing friends or relatives.

Forty-one percent listed surfing the Internet among their favorite pastimes, slightly ahead of the second choices, gardening and home improvements (both 39 percent), and travel and walking (28 percent).

Their top Internet activity was e-mailing (84 percent) and looking for information (83 percent).

Nearly half have booked travel tickets online, a third have tried Internet banking and 28 percent catch up with the news online.

Two thirds regularly contact their children via the Internet, while four in 10 keep in touch with their grandchildren.

AXA said older people were attracted by the Internet's convenience.

"It is encouraging to see British pensioners embracing technology," said AXA spokesman Alison Green. "This report highlights how pensioners are using the Internet to support a less stressful approach to life in later years."

Cyber-Bullying Replaces Schoolyard Bullying Among US Kids

Cyberspace has replaced the schoolyard as the preferred space for bullying among many US kids, who are going online to threaten, insult and harass each other outside the watchful eye of teachers or parents.

According to statistics, more than a third of American teenagers who use instant messaging and social networking sites such as MySpace, FaceBook, Xanga and Friendster fall victim to electronic insults, often by schoolmates.

"Many kids are involved or engaged in this behavior because it is sort of out of distance," Justin Patchin, assistant professor of criminal justice at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, told AFP.

"They don't see the harm that they are causing, they don't really think that they are doing anything wrong, they think they're just having fun," he added.

The bullying includes nasty remarks posted on personal pages or repeated insults during instant messaging conversations.

Sometimes, however, the aggression goes even further. According to a study by the University of Wisconsin, 12.6 percent of respondents reported that they had been threatened physically and almost five percent said they feared for their safety.

The phenomenon has even provoked suicides. In 2005, a 15-year-old boy named Jeff killed himself in the southern state of Florida after being harassed for two years on the Internet by other teenagers.

Another 13-year-old boy from the northeast state of Vermont, Ryan Halligan, committed suicide in 2003. Halligan, who suffered from a slight handicap, had become the butt of jokes on the Internet by several girls.

"Cyber-bullying wasn't the only factor but those who were close to the situation maintained that it was a primary contribution to the kid's depression and ultimate suicide," Patchin said.

He said girls were just as prone to engage in this sort of bullying as boys. Girls are also more likely to be subjected to online bullying - 38.3 percent are bullied against 34.4 percent for boys - but 27.3 percent of them don't hesitate to answer back, according to the University of Wisconsin study.

"When you think about traditional schoolyard bullying, it seems to be a more boy-dominated affair," Patchin said. "But with cyber-bullying, girls and boys are equally likely to be involved in the behavior."

He said girl bullying is "more subtle, more subversive, more indirect or more relational aggression," and the Internet was the perfect place for that kind of aggression.

The most commonly used insults among girls are "fat, ugly, slut and bitch" along with the spreading of lies and rumors.

Faced with this growing trend taking place outside the school walls, American educators say they are often at a loss on how to respond.

"It's a very difficult challenge," said Ann Flynn, director of education at the National School Boards Association. "Basically, it is as if everyday a child walks from school, someone stands on a corner and yells something negative.

"How can the school be held accountable for what happens on the sidewalk?" Many school districts are addressing the problem by creating "respect policies" or honor codes under which cyber-bullying would fall, Flynn said.

"I would really hesitate to see a law passed," she added. "You do get very close to infringing on freedom of speech when you start to legislate some of this."

She said a national study was underway on the use of social networking sites by teenagers and parents' perception of what their children are doing online.

"Quite frankly the social networking phenomenon has grown so quickly that it's very hard to have a good baseline of what's happening," Flynn said.

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